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AUTHOR Cykala, Brenda; Greer, Rose Marie
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ABSTRACT

To explore the perceptions of special education administrators regarding the anticipated effects of restricted funding, survey questionnaires were mailed to a random sample of 200 directors of special education in Texas. Questions regarding demographics, funding sources, staff and program concerns, and assistance needed for coping were asked. Items pertaining to staff or program changes were evaluated in terms of anticipated type and degree of change and anticipated positive or negative effects of that change on the future of special education. Results show that special educators anticipate restricted funding to be long-term and believe education systems will have to rely on the local community more in the future for necessary financial and other resources. Greatest concerns were expressed for inadequate vocational education, staffing problems such as shortages and absenteeism, and a too-high pupil/teacher ratio. To maintain current quality levels, special educators believe it will be necessary to increase integration of regular and special education, improve staff utilization, and train all teachers to manage heterogeneous classrooms. The positive outcomes of funding restrictions they foresee include expansion of volunteer programs and greater creativity and efficiency in the use of equipment and materials. A copy of the survey instrument is included. (Author/VW)

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THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF RESTRICTED FUNDING ON SPECIAL EDUCATION IN TEXAS

by Brenda D. Cykala, M.S.
Rose Marie Greer, M.A.

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This report is the result of a state-wide study conducted in 1987 as a project of the Psychological Services Division of Harris County Department of Education, 6515 Irvington Blvd., Houston, Texas 77022.

FOREWORD

The Harris County Department of Education, located in Houston, Texas, provides a wide variety of services to the twenty-three independent school districts in the county. It is basic to the philosophy of HCDE to be guided by the expressed needs of the districts.

In the spring of 1986, a county-wide survey by the Psychological Services Division of HCDE revealed the need to study the effects of reduced funding on special education. The result is this report. We believe the findings indicate that education in Texas is on the threshold of a new day - a day bright with the excitement of the unknown, with greater demands for creativity and hard work and which will lead to education's being much more dynamic and attractive!

Marlene McKee, M.Ed.
Executive Director
Psychological Services Division

About the Authors

Brenda Cykala is a certified Associate School Psychologist who received her B.S. and M.S. degrees in Psychology at North Texas State University in Denton, Texas. She has had sixteen years experience working with special education programs. For the past ten years she has worked as Coordinator in the Psychological Services Division of Harris County Department of Education. Address: 6515 Irvington Boulevard, Houston, Texas 77022.

Rose Marie Greer is an Assistant Coordinator and a certified Associate School Psychologist for the Psychological Services Division of Harris County Department of Education. She received her B.A. and M.A. in Psychology from the University of North Dakota. She has eleven years experience working with children in special education programs. Address: 6515 Irvington Boulevard, Houston, Texas 77022.

Abstract

Considerable concern about the future of special education is being expressed by special education administrators who are faced with restricted funding. To explore the perceptions of special education administrators regarding the anticipated effects of restricted funding, survey questionnaires were mailed to a random sample of 200 directors of special education in Texas. Questions regarding demographics, funding sources, staff and program concerns, and assistance needed for coping were asked. Items pertaining to staff or program changes were evaluated in terms of anticipated type and degree of change and anticipated positive or negative effects of that change on the future of special education. Results show that special educators anticipate restricted funding to be long-term and education will have to rely on the local community more in the future for the financial and other support resources needed. Greatest concerns (significant at the .05 level) were expressed for inadequate vocational education, staffing problems such as shortages and absenteeism, and a too-high pupil/teacher ratio. If the current quality of education is to be maintained, special educators feel that it will be necessary to push for more integration of regular and special education, better utilization of staff, and training for all teachers in management of heterogeneous classrooms. The special education directors believe that expanded volunteer programs and greater creativity and efficiency in the use of equipment and materials will be positive outcomes.

The Perceived Effects of Restricted Funding on Special Education in Texas

Because of depressed economic conditions across the state, the school districts in Texas face restricted funding. Through a needs assessment survey conducted in the spring of 1986, the special education directors of the school districts of Harris County, the area with the heaviest school population in the state, expressed a need to explore the anticipated effects of restricted funding on the future of special education. In this study "restricted funding" is defined as no increase or actual reduction in funds.

Much of the literature about restricted funding in school districts in other areas of the country reveals a generally negative perception of the consequences. According to Hood, Cates, Hering and McKibbin (1982), special education programs in California have been affected by revenue reductions. The state has "relaxed the requirements for services of classroom aides, allowed larger classes, and cut the number of state-level special education specialists. These moves, combined with the fiscal difficulties resulting from reduced ECIA Chapter 1 funds, will continue to create problems for California schools" (p. 1-41). Staff development has continued to receive priority support, especially when attached to specific program improvement activities.

In the state of Nevada, cutbacks are taking the form of less travel, fewer consultants, and general reduction in support for programs. It is also anticipated that staff development activities will be cut back as budgets get tighter (Hood et al., 1982).

Curtailment in compensatory education services has been one of the effects of restricted monies in Utah. In addition, staff have been eliminated and funds for indirect costs, supplies and travel have been cut (Hood et al., 1982).

According to "Education of the Handicapped" (1986), special educators will face tremendous competition for resources in the future as economic and demographic changes take place in the United States. As ethnic proportions change, we will educate a very different group of students. We will have a much larger group of older persons who will have little contact with the schools and will want to keep their tax rates low.

Wertlieb, Horvitz and Donnellan (1986) conducted a survey of professionals' and administrators' perceptions of the effects of economic constraint on special education services for young and severely handicapped children in the northeastern region of Massachusetts. Results showed trends toward a serious decrease in staff morale and a decrease in ancillary services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy and physical therapy. Other areas of perceived cutback were purchase of classroom materials, funding to replace worn or broken materials and service to families. Some

reported that staff hours would be cut back along with an increase in the number of skills expected.

On a positive note, the authors commented that program quality seemed to be maintained in spite of the cutbacks. They attributed this, at least in part, to lack of staff turnover. Hood et al. (1982) also report that, although there were cutbacks in some programs and services among the agencies they contacted that were suffering from retrenchment, the programs and services that remained seemed to be able to maintain quality and efficiency. In some cases, new projects aimed at finding alternative ways of serving students emerged. New cooperative efforts among agencies were developing. Bisco and Fink (1985) in their article, "Cutting Wheels and Dollars", write about the successful attempts of the Oklahoma City Public Schools to significantly offset budget reductions by developing a more efficient transportation routing system for special education students.

Several other writers have suggested ways school districts can cope with restricted funding. Wertlieb et al. (1986) believe that teacher trainers, administrators and teachers must increase their awareness of the range of responses to cutbacks and enhance their skills in the management of change. According to McGuire (1983), states should assist districts by providing small planning grants to be used for paying teachers for additional time spent on planning and for consultants to assist in the process. Crowner (1985) states that special educators need to be well-versed regarding the fiscal aspect of service delivery so that they are aware of the various funding options and their effects on policy and programming. Roddy (1983) writes that it is most important to continue to build bridges between regular and special education in times of fiscal constraint. Regular classroom teachers need to be given assistance in adapting technology, curricula and presentation style so they can include more learning disabled youngsters in their classrooms. Corbett, Rossman and Dawson (1984) suggest that districts can offset the loss of restricted funds by increased flexibility and taking advantage of opportunities to be innovative.

In light of the current literature and research, it is anticipated that the special education directors in this study will perceive restricted funding as having negative effects on services to students. However, they are also likely to view some changes in patterns of administering and delivering service as positive. Their combined perceptions should give us insight into future trends and help us anticipate and prepare for changes that are expected to occur as a result of restricted funding.

Method

Subjects

A complete listing of all the special education programs in Texas and their 346 directors was obtained from the Texas Education Agency. This listing was used to select a random sample of 200 special education directors. Twelve of the twenty-three school

districts in Harris County fell into the sample. A questionnaire return rate of 24.5% resulted in a sample of 49 directors. Six of these were from Harris County.

Materials

A questionnaire was designed to gather the following kinds of information: (1) demographic data, (2) funding information, (3) staff and program concerns, and (4) assistance needed for coping.

Before the final form of the questionnaire was mailed, input regarding need for the study and design of the questionnaire was sought from several sources including: (1) the Director of Special Education Programs and the Director of Special Education Funding at the Texas Education Agency, (2) the Region IV Education Service Center, (3) a staff development consultant for special education at Harris County Department of Education, (4) two special education directors in Harris County, and (5) several administrative staff in the Psychological Services Division of Harris County Department of Education.

Procedure

On January 19, 1987, the questionnaires along with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study were mailed to 200 directors of Special Education. As of February 13, 1987, 33 questionnaires had been returned. A follow-up letter was sent after which 16 more questionnaires were returned resulting in a final sample of 49.

Results

Demographic Information

The 49 districts represented in the sample reported an average district daily attendance ranging from 250 in the smallest district to 58,216 in the largest district. Although the overall mean for each ethnic group was 13.7% Black, 66.4% Caucasian, 19% Hispanic, .5% Asian, and .4% other, the range for each group (see Table 1) reveals the extreme differences in ethnic distribution from one district to another.

Table 1
Ethnic Distribution of Sample

Ethnic Group	Range	Mean
Black	0-93%	13.7%
Caucasian	3-100%	66.4%
Hispanic	0-97%	19.0%
Asian	0-4%	.5%
Other	0-6%	.4%

Seven districts classified themselves as urban, twenty-three as

rural and 18 as suburban. The range of responses regarding the socioeconomic status reveals a very diverse population (see Table 2).

Table 2
Socioeconomic Distribution of Sample

Status	Range	Mean
Upper	0-35%	9.8%
Middle	0-90%	54.9%
Lower	0-99%	35.3%

Fifty-three percent of the districts expect more than 10% population growth over the next five years. Forty-five percent expect a stable (no change) population. Only 2% anticipate a reduction of 10% or more in population.

Over the next five years, transiency of students is expected to increase in 61% of the districts. Thirty-five percent believe things will stay the same and 4% believe there will be a reduction in transiency.

According to the results of this sample, an average of 11.5% of the school district population in Texas is served through special education. However, the percentage served in individual districts ranges from one percent in one district to twenty-two percent in another. Further data analysis revealed that those districts which serve 13% or more in special education are the smaller, rural districts with a high amount of transiency.

Funding

Table 3 shows the breakdown of funding for the 86-87 school year and whether there is an increase or decrease over the previous (85-86) school year. The three primary funding sources are state special education funds, local funds, and federal P.L. 94-142 funds. Overall, there has been approximately a 5% decrease in state funds which is the largest funding source. Use of local funds has increased by 4%. Results also show slightly more than 1% increase in P.L. 94-142 monies. At least 85% of the districts said they expect restricted funding to be a long-term problem.

When asked about anticipated funding sources for the future, 79.6% said they expect future funding to come from local tax increases. Co-oping with other districts was identified as a possible funding source by 36.7%. Almost 13% of the districts anticipate that private donations, co-ops with other agencies, grant monies or business partnerships will be useful financial sources. Only 22.4% of the districts have staff who secure grant monies for their district.

Table 3
Funding Sources (86-87) and Changes from Previous Year

Funding	Mean	Increase	Dist	Decrease	Dist
P.L.94-142	12.27%	3.39%	22	2.21%	10
Chapter I	2.19%	5.84%	9	.76%	4
State Sp.Ed.	54.90%	1.40%	11	6.36%	15
Other State	1.79%	2.16%	10	.10%	1
Local	21.74%	4.37%	16	.11%	3
Spec. Grants	.23%	2.04%	1	.00%	0
Other	.12%	.00%	0	.29%	1

Further analysis shows that of the fifteen districts who received a mean decrease of 6.36% in state funds, the largest number were rural (46.7%) while 33.3% of the districts were suburban and 20% were urban.

Staff and Program Concerns

When asked about the effects of restricted funding on severely handicapped and mildly/moderately handicapped, 30.6% said there would be less services for severely handicapped while 51% said there would be less services for mildly/moderately handicapped; 2% said there would be more special education services for the severely handicapped while 4.1% said there would be more services for the mildly/moderately handicapped. Of the respondents, 34.7% felt there would be no change from current services for severely handicapped while 20.4% felt there would be no change in current services for mildly/moderately handicapped.

Districts were asked to respond to 31 items relating to staff and programs. With each item, the respondents reported the degree of change they expected due to restricted funding and whether they perceived that change as positive or negative.

Table 4 lists the items in which the degree of expected change reported was found to be statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence.

Table 4
Expected Changes Significant at the .05 Level of Confidence

More of These Are Expected	Less of These Are Expected
Compensatory education	Vocational education
Student to teacher ratio	Admin/supervisory staff
Staff shortages	Related mental health staff
Staff absenteeism	Use of independent consultants
Staff turnover	Custodial/maintenance staff
Salary	Staff travel
Diversity of duties	Purchase of equipment and instructional materials
Staff hours	General office/teacher supplies
Use of student teachers	
Use of special education staff as consultants to reg. ed.	
Volunteer programs	
Use of community agency services	
More efficient and creative use of available materials and supplies	

According to the above table, the directors anticipate reduction in vocational education, a variety of staff positions and staff travel. However, greater use of student teachers, volunteers, community agencies and special education staff as consultants to regular education is anticipated. Staff are expected to become more diversified in their duties, work longer hours, and make more money. Districts suspect they will face greater staff shortages, staff turnover, and absenteeism. Student/teacher ratio will increase and compensatory education will expand.

At one point during the statistical analysis, the six Harris County districts were examined as a separate group to see if there were any significant differences between the Harris County districts and the rest of the state. Results showed that there were significant differences on two of the program concern items. Harris County districts stated significantly more often (.05 level of confidence) that they expected to either maintain or increase administrative/supervisory staff and maintain or increase mental health related service staff. Other districts reported statistically more often that they expect to have less of these kinds of staff.

Table 5 shows items in which the responses regarding the positive or negative long-term effect of an anticipated change were found to be statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence.

Table 5
Long Term Effect of Expected Change

Change	Positive	Negative
More volunteer programs	X	
More efficient and creative use of equipment and materials	X	
Less vocational education		X
Higher student/teacher ratio		X
More staff shortages		X
More staff absenteeism		X
Higher salary		X
More staff turnover		X
More diversity of duties		X
More staff hours		X
Less mental health service staff		X
Slightly less other related service staff		X
Less aides on staff		X
Slightly less secretarial staff		X
Less staff travel		X
Slightly less purchase of equipment		X
Slightly less general office and teacher supplies		X
Slightly less staff morale		X

Although 71.4% of the directors said they expect the quality of special education to be reduced, many of them commented that they expect reduction in quality "if an increase in local funding cannot be achieved". However, 24.5% felt the quality of special education would be maintained and 4.6% felt quality would improve. They quoted the following as reasons why current quality would continue: local funding, more cooperation with other districts, more creative use of resources, refined delivery systems, more integration of regular and special education, greater teacher commitment, parent advocacy and staff creativity. Those who felt quality would improve commented that the improvement would be primarily a result of greater coordination of efforts to integrate regular and special education to provide a continuous flow of services for all types of students.

Assistance Needed for Coping

Districts report that one priority in coping with restricted funding is to learn to achieve "better utilization of staff". The second priority need expressed was "more training in how to manage a heterogeneous classroom". Two responses were tied for a third priority need. According to these responses, districts need a "greater understanding of the various models of service delivery" and "more training in stress management".

Discussion and Conclusions

The authors of this study believe that a group's collective perceptions and expectations about the future make up a powerful force that influences that future. The first step in using that force in a positive and proactive way is to identify those perceptions and expectations and take action based upon that awareness.

The perceptions of special education directors in Texas as revealed in this study suggest that:

1. Restricted funding will be a long-term problem.

2. There is a lack of faith in alternative funding sources outside of the local area. Thus, chances are that school boards and administrators will look to the local community for more and more assistance. The question now seems to be how our schools will do this? Will they create ways to involve our senior citizens in education so they will be motivated to pay school taxes and give their time and energy? Will schools create business/school partnerships to add new resources? Will they work out more cooperative programs with nearby districts? Will marketing public education to the community become a primary goal for school districts?

3. The student population in Texas is very diverse and the characteristics of the population may change drastically from one district to another. This presents a tremendous challenge for educators who must learn how to manage very heterogeneous classrooms.

4. Districts report a need to learn how to better utilize present staff. Will they call on more parents, volunteers and student helpers to assist teachers? Will districts increase hours, reward innovation and reward teachers for development of skills for managing a heterogeneous classroom as well as reward them for increases in student test scores?

5. Although the threat of restricted funding generates the anticipation of negative results, there is a strong undercurrent of positive thinking that greater efficiency, creativity, more volunteer programs, better integration of regular and special education, more local funding and community effort along with staff commitment will result in continued quality education.

6. Although most districts report special education is not expected to grow in overall student numbers, it is anticipated that more creative, alternative methods of funding and serving students will be developed for both the severely handicapped and mildly/moderately handicapped.

Recommendations

From the results of this study, it appears that, to cope effectively with restricted funding, school districts in Texas will need to develop goals and specific plans for dealing with the following major areas of concern.

1. Marketing Education to the local community to secure the resources needed.

Strategies will need to be developed for soliciting resources from taxpayers, senior citizens, business/school partnerships, and through volunteer programs and co-operative efforts with surrounding school districts.

2. Planning for Vocational Education.

Special education directors expressed this as the strongest area of concern. Perhaps a special task force on vocational education could work with the task force on the state's dropout problem and with the implementor of compensatory education to develop a comprehensive system for educating students who do not fit well into the regular academic plan.

3. Planning for better staff utilization and training.

The study suggests that districts need to identify the extent to which staff will need to diversify the duties they perform and then train them accordingly. In-service on "How to Manage a Heterogeneous Classroom" will be very important. To impress teachers with the importance of learning to deal with heterogeneity, it may be necessary to develop a system to reward those who initiate improving their skill in this area. The system would need to be competitive with any system that also rewards teachers for producing higher test scores. Research suggests that heterogeneous classrooms and higher test scores can and should go hand in hand.

4. Integrating regular, compensatory and special education.

The special education directors reporting in the study expressed a strong belief that there will be greater integration of these educational entities in the future. Districts must prepare for and make strides in the direction of integration so as to provide a smooth continuum of services for all students. If our leaders at the national level continue to stress the need for integration, we may see changes in funding structure that help facilitate integration. Districts must identify specific skills and begin planning for the kind of teacher training that will make integration possible.

5. Providing positive direction.

Administrators in education should lead the way in providing their staff with a positive vision of the future of education. Teachers are much more likely to get excited about managing a heterogeneous

classroom if they are led to see it as interesting, challenging and perhaps adventurous. They are more likely to be successful if they view the future of education in Texas as a multifaceted population working in harmony to ensure quality education for all students.

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APPENDIX

EFFECTS OF RESTRICTED FUNDING

Demographic Data

1. What is your district's average daily attendance for the 86-87 school year? _____

2. What percentage of your district is classified as Black ____ %, Caucasian ____ %, Hispanic ____ %, Asian ____ %, Other ____ %? Total should be 100%.

3. Is your district considered [ ] Urban, [ ] Rural, [ ]Suburban?

4. What percentage of your district's student population is in Special Education? ____ %.

5. Describe your school district's population in terms of the following:

____ % upper socioeconomic status
____ % middle socioeconomic status
____ % lower socioeconomic status

6. Over the next five years what do you anticipate in terms of student population?

A. Reduction of more than 10% __ C. No significant change __
B. Increase of more than 10% __

7. What do you anticipate in terms of student transiency during the next five years?

A. Reduced transiency _____ C. No change _____
B. Increased transiency _____

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Funding

8. In column I, write the percentage of your Special Education funding for 1986-87 from each source. In columns II and III, write the percentage of increase or decrease in funds from the year 1985-86. Use column II for increase and column III for decrease.

	86-87 Column I	85-86 Column II (increase)	85-86 Column III (decrease)
A. Federal Law 94-142	_____ %	_____ %	_____ %
B. Chapter I Handicapped	_____ %	_____ %	_____ %
C. State Special Education Funds	_____ %	_____ %	_____ %
D. Other state discretionary or special grants (i.e., VH, regional co-op, deaf-ed, etc.)	_____ %	_____ %	_____ %

	86-87 Column I	85-86 Column II (increase)	85-86 Column III (decrease)
E. Local taxes	_____ %	_____ %	_____ %
F. Other special grants (government or private)	_____ %	_____ %	_____ %
G. Other:			
Type _____	_____ %	_____ %	_____ %
_____	_____ %	_____ %	_____ %
_____	_____ %	_____ %	_____ %

The total in column I should equal 100%.

9. To supplement restricted state and federal funds, which of the following alternative funding sources does your district anticipate using during the next five years?

Business partnerships _____
Increase in local taxes _____
Grant monies _____
Cooperative agreements with other social service agencies _____
Private donations _____
Cooperative agreements with other school districts __
Other: _____
_____

10. Do you have someone on your staff who secures grant monies for your district? Yes [ ], No [ ]

11. Do you believe that restricted funding is temporary [ ] or long term [ ]?

- -

Staff & Program Concerns

12. What will be the effect of restricted funding on severely handicapped students?

A. _____ Less services
B. _____ More Special Education services
C. _____ No change from current services
D. _____ More creative, alternative methods of serving and funding will be developed

13. What will be the effect of restricted funding on mild/moderate handicapped students?

A. _____ Less services
B. _____ More Special Education services
C. _____ No change from current services
D. _____ More creative, alternative methods of serving and funding will be developed

14. Check in the appropriate column the degree of change precipitated by restricted funding in Special Education. In the sixth (6th) column, circle P (for positive) or N (for negative) to report your perception regarding the long term effect of each item on the quality of programs.

Item	Much Less	Slightly Less	No Change	Slightly More	Much More	Long Term Effect
A. # of new students qualified for Special Education						P or N
B. Amount of compensatory education offered by Regular Education						P or N
C. Opportunity for student work program on the school premises						P or N
D. Vocational education						P or N
E. Summer school programs						P or N
F. Student/teacher ratio						P or N
G. Staff shortages						P or N
H. Staff morale						P or N
I. Staff absenteeism						P or N
J. Salary						P or N
K. Staff turnover						P or N
L. Staff inservice training						P or N
M. Diversity of duties expected of staff members						P or N
N. # of hours staff members are required to work						P or N
O. Use of student teachers or interns						P or N
P. # of administrative/ supervisory positions						P or N
Q. # of related service staff (counselors, psychologists, diagnosticians, etc.)						P or N
R. # of related service staff (OT/PT/Music Therapy, etc.)						P or N
S. Use of independent consultants						P or N
T. Use of Special Education staff as consultants to Regular Education						P or N
U. # of aides on staff						P or N
V. # of secretarial/ clerical staff						P or N
W. # of custodial/ maintenance service staff						P or N
X. Parent training programs						P or N

Item	Much Less	Slightly Less	No Change	Slightly More	Much More	Long Term Effect
Y. Volunteer programs						P or N
Z. Student transportation						P or N
AA. Staff travel						P or N
BB. Use of services from other community agencies						P or N
CC. Efficiency and creativity in use of materials and equipment already available						P or N
DD. Purchase of equipment and instructional materials						P or N
EE. General office/ teacher supplies						P or N

15. If restricted funding continues, what will happen to the overall quality of your Special Education programs?

____ Same ____ Reduced quality ____ Improved quality

If same or improved, list the factors that will allow you to maintain or improve quality (i.e., teacher creativity, etc.).

_____

_____

- -

Assistance Needed for Coping

16. Assuming that restricted funding continues, check from the following the three you feel will be most needed in your district to maintain quality programming.

_____ 1. Better use of technology
_____ 2. Greater coordination with community agencies
_____ 3. Better utilization of staff
_____ 4. Greater understanding of the various models of service delivery
_____ 5. More fund-raising
_____ 6. More volunteer services
_____ 7. Greater knowledge of funding options
_____ 8. More training in how to manage a heterogeneous classroom
_____ 9. More training in stress management
_____ 10. Others: _____
_____ 11. _____
_____ 12. _____
_____ 13. _____